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JULY, 1898.

BRUSH AND PENCIL.

VOL. II.

No. 4.

THE TWELVE GREAT MASTERPIECES.

II.

AN article in the June number of BRUSH AND PENCIL discusses some special art work which has been done during the past two years in the West Aurora High School. It is mentioned therein that this year's study dealt with the world's greatest paintings, or, rather, with twenty-four of them, but no statement is made as to which twenty-four paintings were considered. No haphazard list was made, but rather one based on much deliberation, and hence, possibly, one of some value. The method used in selecting the list, and some of the results obtained, have seemed to the editor of this magazine of sufficient interest to warrant the publishing of a few papers on the subject.

While selecting a subject for this year's study, the writer thought of a list designated in one of the much-used histories of painting as "The Twelve World Pictures," and decided this would be an excellent starting point. The list is as follows:

Raphael	Transfiguration.
Raphael	Sistine Madonna.
Michael Angelo.....	Last Judgment.
Domenichino.....	Last Communion of St. Jerome.
Volterra	Descent from the Cross.
Rubens.....	Descent from the Cross.
Leonardo da Vinci.....	Last Supper.
Titian	Assumption of the Virgin.
Correggio.....	Nativity (Holy Night).
Guido Reni	Aurora.
Guido Reni (?).....	Beatrice Cenci.
Murillo.....	Immaculate Conception.

Now, one needs a very slight knowledge of art to recognize the inadequacy and untruth of this list as representing the twelve greatest paintings in the world—if such a phrase may be used. Investigation, however, shows that list has many upholders: That, as Professor Story, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, writes, "It is the generally accepted belief that the paintings enumerated are the ones to which that distinction has been given"; that, according to the proprietor of one of the leading art stores in Chicago, this list has been accepted for over a century,

although no one knows by whom it was made or upon what authority ; and, even, that this list has been given as authoritative to the students in the art department of one of our Western colleges.

With such a pedigree, the list will at least command respect, thought the writer, and so a circular letter was prepared and sent to eighty or ninety of America's leading artists, art critics, curators of art collections, and other persons interested in art.

After an introduction telling of the previous art work done in the school, the letter continues :

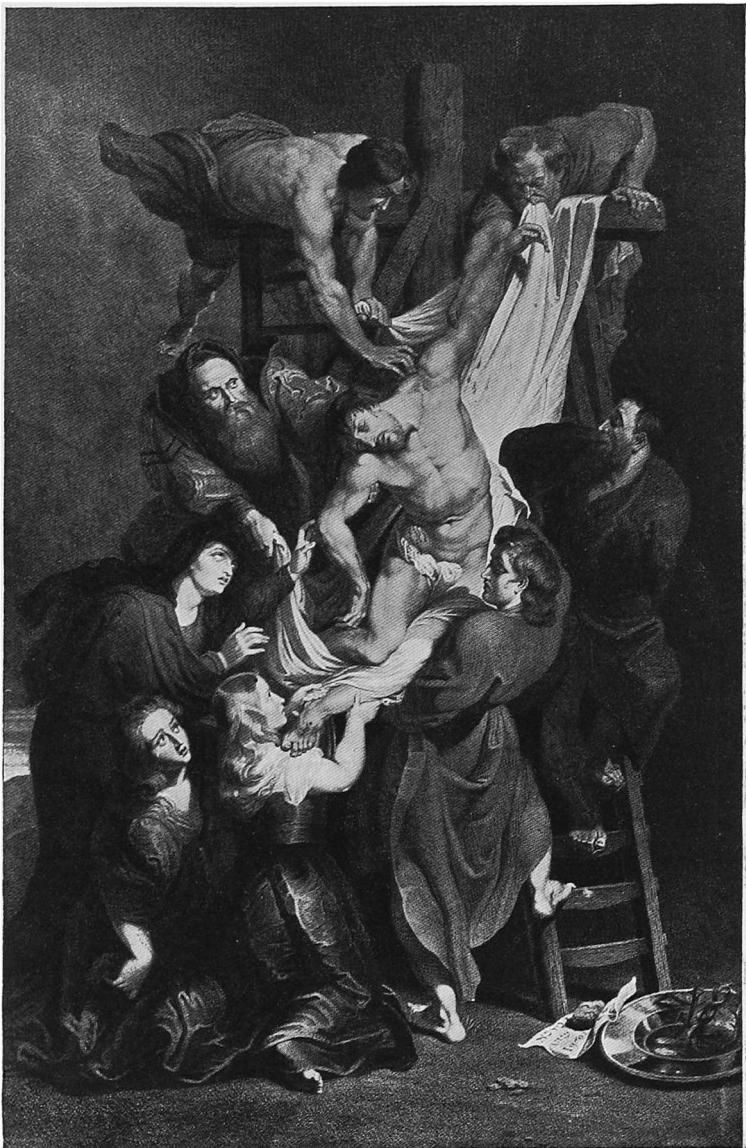
" This year we wish to devote the greater part of the month of February to the study of the great paintings of the world, and it is in this connection I wish to ask a favor of you. As it is somewhat a matter of opinion as to which are the great, or rather the greatest, paintings, we have to solve the problem as satisfactorily as possible by obtaining the opinions of America's leading authorities on art. Will you, then, confer the kindness upon the school and community — for the citizens at large become interested in this special art work — of answering, at such length as may be convenient, the three following questions : 1. Do you consider the paintings enumerated on the attached slip as being the twelve greatest paintings produced up to the time of the death of Murillo (1682), say the close of the seventeenth century ? Or would you, for instance, reject Volterra's 'Descent,' Guido Reni's 'Beatrice,' or Domenichino's 'Last Communion,' and insert something of Velasquez's or Rembrandt's, or some other work or works ? 2. Which do you consider the twelve greatest paintings produced since the close of the seventeenth century ? which, I suppose, is practically the same as saying, during the nineteenth century. 3. Do you consider any in the list just asked for as being equal or superior to 'The Twelve World Paintings' ? That is, which twelve would you name as being the twelve greatest paintings now in existence ? "

As will be seen, this letter was framed to provoke discussion, and it fulfilled its mission. A large proportion of answers was received. Considering the unsatisfactory nature of the questions, the difficulties of definition of terms, standards of judgment, "the personal equation in both artist and spectator," we may say that the eighty per cent — such is about the proportion — of responses represents an unusually large percentage, and shows, together with the cordial interest everywhere manifested, that the art lovers of America are willing and anxious to aid in every way the extension of the art education of our country.

So interesting were some of the answers, that the editor of BRUSH AND PENCIL has thought a series of articles dealing with the letters and the work which called them forth might be of value. The *raison d'être* of the



HOLBEIN —
THE MADONNA OF THE
BURGOMASTER MEYER, DARMSTADT



RUBENS —
DESCENT FROM THE CROSS
ANTWERP CATHEDRAL

letters being explained, let us now review them in so far as they enter into the selecting of the lists mentioned in my circular letter.

Naturally there was a great divergence of opinion. The first general observation we gather from the letters is that there are several objections to classifying the world's paintings into groups of twelve, or, indeed, into groups of any number — for some of the answers assume this position. Three typical quotations will set forth these objections. James William Pattison, of the Art Institute, Chicago, asks in his characteristic breezy manner, "Why wrap up your art in dozens? That smacks of the daily grind. If you must have the grocery system, why not do it by the gross? I like it by larger lots, thus giving every man more than one showing of virtue. In fact, I like not to choose a picture at all. It is men's whole lives, men's works which influence the world. . . . I am seriously offended by the fashion" (of making small groups of pictures). George de Forrest Brush writes from Worcester, Massachusetts: "I do not feel prepared to classify the masterpieces of art any more than I would give my opinion of the works of Nature, saying which was the most beautiful tree or flower — the lily or the rose, the elm or the oak. I regard all the great works with unmixed delight, and feel that we do not quite comprehend when we too easily classify them as good, better, best. . . . I feel on the whole that it is misleading to attempt what you have undertaken." The opinion of John S. Clark, of the Prang Educational Company, is as follows: "It would appear next to impossible to make out one list of twelve pictures which would be quite satisfactory, as a choice must depend not alone on the chooser's personal bias, but on the idea behind the choice, the idea of 'greatness' as meaning nobility of conception, or perfection of technic, or the typifying of the spirit of their respective times and places."

No one will deny that there is force in the objections represented by the quotations from these three gentlemen, and yet there are few people who cannot see, with Lorado Taft, "the advantage of bunching for school purposes." In fact, it has seemed to the writer that, in spite of the dangers of narrowing the artistic vision, there is even an advantage in the process for the public in general. Right or wrong, the people will make out lists, as the one about to be discussed proves. In learning to read, the beginner must have a primer to start with; the wealth of Shakespeare would bewilder him. The tyro in art is not capable of studying all the paintings of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and a dozen other painters; but he can learn something of these men by studying the "Sistine Madonna," the "Creation of Adam," and a dozen other paintings. If the people will have lists, ought not art authorities do all in their power to make these lists as good as possible? The lists may be large or small,



MICHAEL ANGELO —
CREATION OF ADAM
SISTINE CHAPEL, ROME

according to the purpose in view; we have retained the original number, for, as A. F. Barnard, of Chicago, remarks, "Although the number 12 is an arbitrary one, it seems well to cling to it."

The second general fact noticeable in the letters is that the third question proposed is in most cases left unanswered, or at least answered in such a way that one is obliged to conclude that, by correspondence at least, no satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at. Mrs. Lucy F. Perkins epitomizes the difficulties: "It seems to me our ideas and standards of painting have so entirely changed during the last century that one can hardly compare the modern with the paintings before the eighteenth century. The whole spirit has changed, the inspiration is different, and the technic as well." Charles Francis Browne's letter offers some explanation of these difficulties: "The modern painting is more scientific than ever before—but it often lacks power and reflects the age. . . . The religious life and stimulus (of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) is waning or gone, and so the highest motive is gone. To do *anything* well is a low ambition, but it is the spirit of modern art." Yet there are not wanting correspondents who agree with John S. Clark when he writes: "I should say quite readily that among the works of these modern artists are some quite as 'great' as those of the earlier centuries." In some instances particular painters and paintings are mentioned, but there is no general agreement except upon Millet, who, by almost common consent, would be allowed a position beside Raphael, Michael Angelo, and other giants of the Renaissance.

PETER WILLIAM DYKEMAR.

(*To be continued.*)



THE EXHIBITION OF THE NATIONAL SCULPTURE SOCIETY.

II.

THE accompanying illustrations will give a better idea of the beauty of the recent exhibition of sculpture in New York than would pages of description. Here busts and statues were seen in the environment which seems best theirs, amid flowers and against backgrounds of rich green foliage. Vanderbilt gallery offered a score of pictures most enticing to the painter or illustrator. A runaway camera could scarce go astray here. Happily a photographer has wandered through the exhibition and preserved some charming bits for us.

Take for instance this glimpse of the improvised Ward fountain, seen through the colonnade and contrasting its snowy figures and brilliant flower plumes with the banks of green. Herbert Adams' Professor Henry